Chapter 20
Dust And Darkness

SHFF
FLOMP
Tell me about him.

Help me out here. I only just met him, and we haven't really had time to chat.
You're obviously really close.
How'd you two meet?
I tried to die for him.
...Oh.
I'm guessing he stopped you?
He tried.
He never stopped trying, no matter how much it hurt.
I couldn't stop him. All I could do was heal the damage, over and over again.
He never gave up on me.
On anyone.
Except himself.
SQUEEZE
It's not easy to be kind to yourself.
Some people never even think of it.
Like, for instance, how YOU really need to sleep before you seriously hurt yourself.
You don't understand.
I was alone for so long. I had to be.
My world was tiny and sad, but I understood it. I knew what I was - what it meant.
Then Kendal helped me shatter it.
Suddenly I didn't know anything. The world was huge and confusing, and I had to be PART of it.
But I had Kendal.
He made the world simple.
When I was with him, everywhere felt like home.
Without him, nothing does.

I do understand.
After I was Sparked, I couldn't sit still for a second.
I wasn't happy where I was, and I'd lost so much time there already.
Erin was family, but he wasn't my home.
I hadn't had a home since I was very small.
So I went back. All the way to Ironhill.
I found the rest of my family.
It was warm and safe and full of singing and laughter.
But it wasn't home anymore.
So I kept traveling, and I got to know myself better.
And one night I was sitting on a high cliffside, roasting dinner and watching the stars dance-
-and I felt the wind on my face and the storm over the horizon and the curve of the world turning away-
-and I felt home all around me.
My home is something I carry with me.
It's not for everyone, I know.
It has no walls or ceiling, for one thing, so the rain tends to get in.
But I built it, inch by inch, from the things I learned I love.
So, until you're feeling better, and until your home wakes up-
-will you let me share my home with you?

PAT
PAT

SHFF..

CLATTER
FLOP
"Disappointingly boring," he says.

HEY!
CRACK!
HISS!
TAP
TAP
I knew it reeked down here.
What kind of nightmare are you?
SSSSSSS
STARING

RAAAH!!
SSSSS!..
WIF
CRAK
HAHH
HAHH
SNIFF

Hey.
Hey!
SNAP
C'mon, wake up. We can't stay-
SWAT
WHOA!
Cut it out! It's me!
SNAP
SNAP
SNAP
WHIZZ
Falst?
S-sorry! I can't see a thing!
Then do your fire thing instead of kicking me in the face about it.
Fire?
This is an enclosed underground space, right?
Looks that way.
Ick.
Then I'm sorry, but absolutely no fire.
What?
Trust me.
If we're lucky, I just burn up all our breathable air.
If we're not, I hit a pocket of explosive gas.
You don't play with fire this far down.
And stop wriggling. There's a rockslide piled up in the chute behind you, and these cables are tangled in it.
How'd you even GET this stuck?

Suit yourself, but if that thing comes back and eats you, that's not my fault.
What?
Get ready to drop.
SNAP
SNAP
SNAP
SNAP
ZWIT
THUMP
Falst?
CRACK
You need light, right?
Did... you just pull out its brain?
Okay, mister picky, want me to put it back?
Besides, it's just a lacrima. This thing was never alive.
I know.
But that doesn't mean it couldn't think.

You wanna keep pondering this thing or are we gonna find a way out of this mess?
Right. Sorry.
Erin said this was an Ancient ruin. We must have fallen into a part he didn't explore.
Didn't or couldn't. That chute hadn't been opened in a long time.
Okay. Let's think this through.
It's some kind of Ancient facility. It's far enough underground that they had to have designed it this way.
So it's... a bunker?
Even if the way we came in wasn't blocked, it's a steep chute - not a way out.
We could've climbed it.
WE could.
But this place was designed to be used by lots of people.
They'd have wanted stairs.
You're thinking there's another way out.
I think there has to be.
This place isn't built like a tomb.
Eurgh.
Still smells terrible, but the air's not totally stagnant.
We're getting wind from somewhere.
Which also might be how the monsters are getting in.
We wanted to keep the others safe.
Whatever's down here-
-we'll deal with it together.

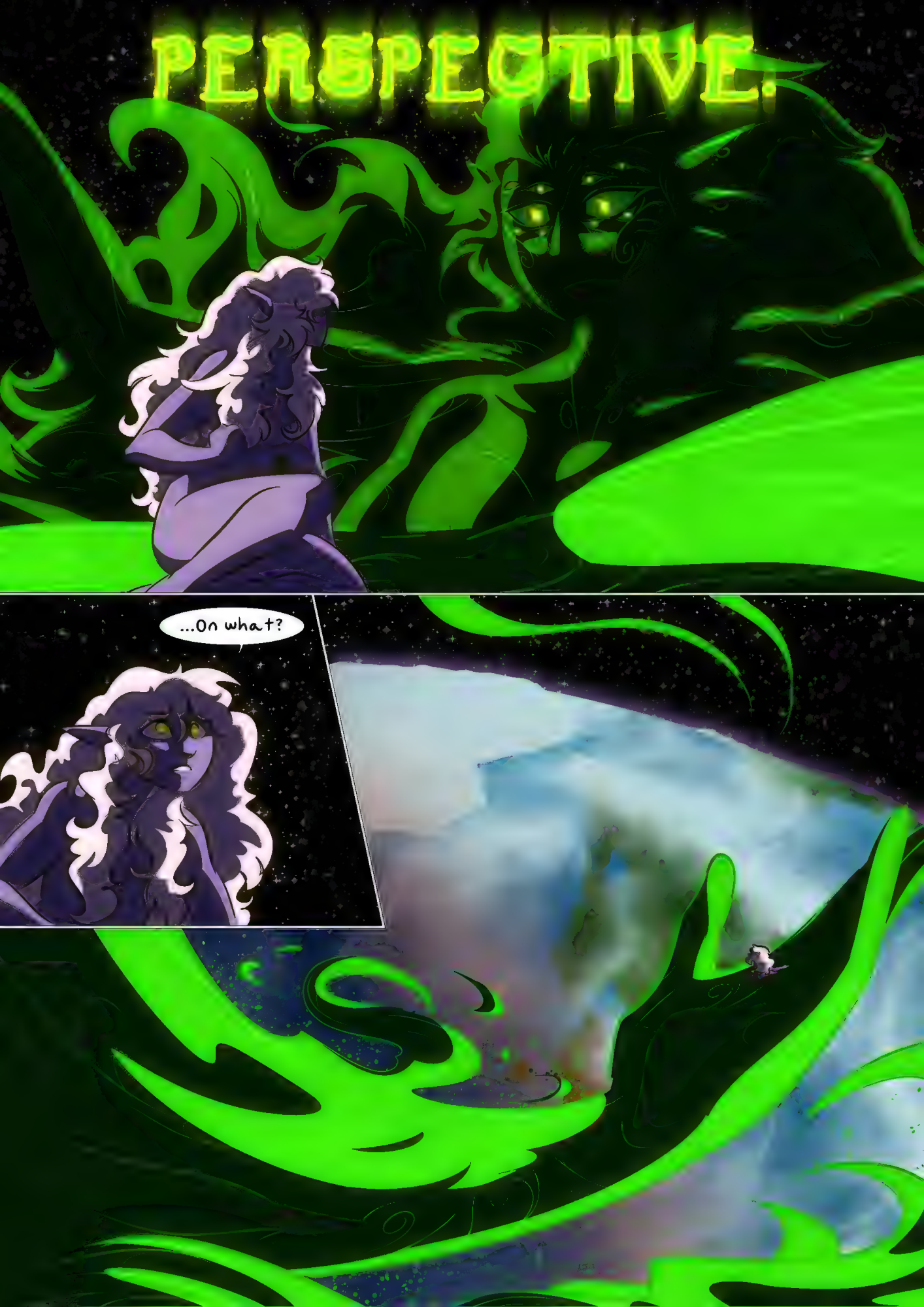
Please, my lord.
Get up.
How can you say that?
I only exist because you died.
How could anyone deserve that?
One life for tens of thousands?
The only way I could ever hope to make up for that was freeing your souls-
But I FAILED.
I couldn't save Vash.
I can't save any of you.
How can I face you now?

Do you remember me?
Vira.
Your mother was Fleur. You helped with her bakery.
You- you were six years old.
Thank you!
Everyone I knew was in Vash.
Without you, there'd be nobody remembering me.
Nobody would even know I was born!
I'll tell momma you remember her too!
BLOOP
How could we ever hate you for living?
Every legacy we'd ever built to shine into the future was destroyed alongside us. Our art, culture - even our children.
She ended our whole world.
We thought we'd lost everything.
And then... there was you.

You're more of a legacy than we ever could've hoped for.
...But I couldn't save you.
You're all trapped down here because I wasn't strong enough.
It's a terrible thing he asked of you.
I bet he regrets it, but his only other choice was forsaking us.
But the living shouldn't be sacrificed for the dead.
If you choose to put down your sword and live a peaceful, joyous life-
-that life will still be a greater gift than any of us dreamed of.
You are our future, but that future is yours alone to spend.
What do you want to do with it?

Are you ever going to let me have normal dreams again?

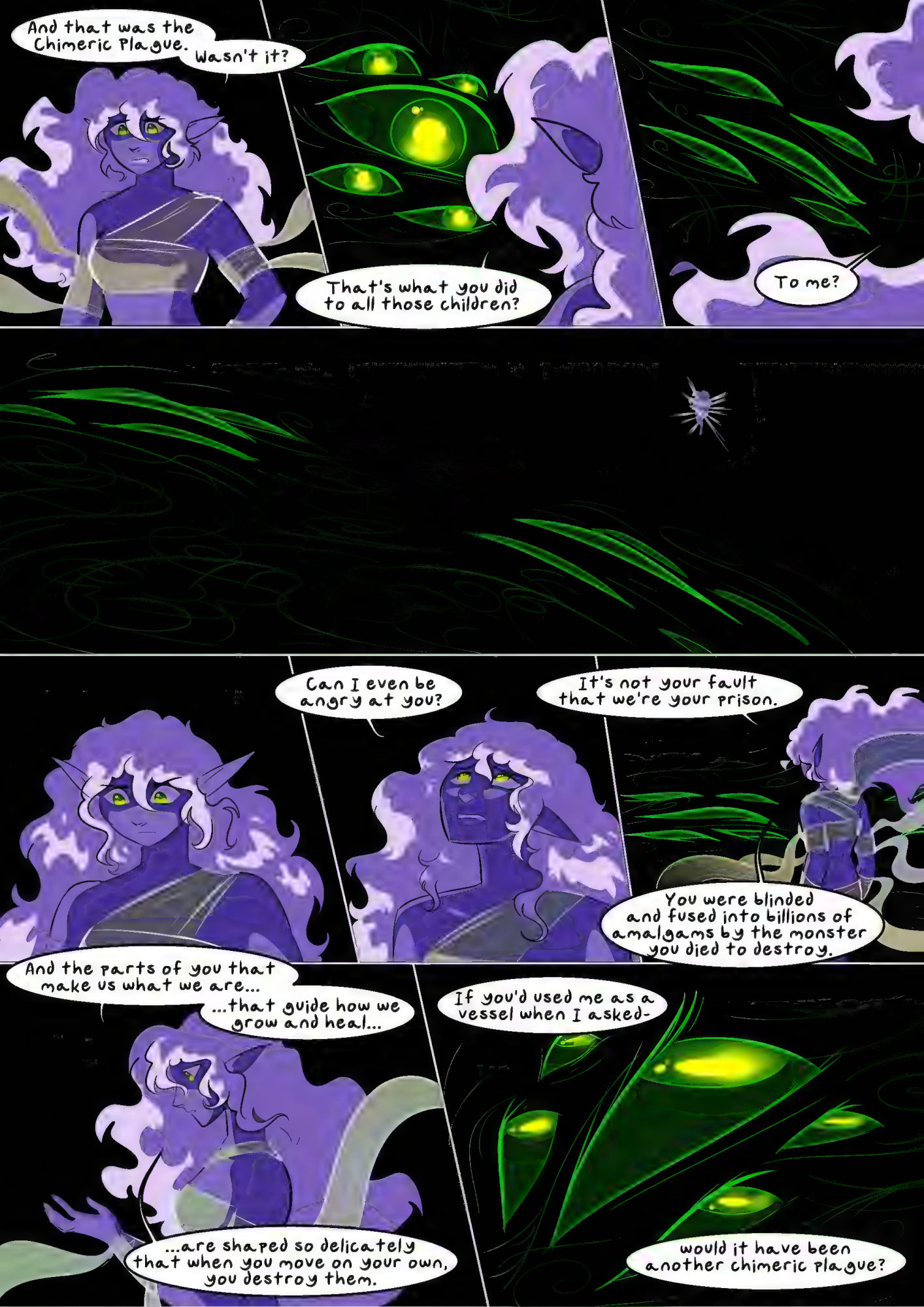
What do you want from me?
Come on!
There HAD to be a reason!
Don't you understand what you DID to me?!
I spent ten years waiting for you to kill me! Ten years with you pushing until I finally lost control!
You took everything from me, and- and now you act like nothing happened!
So just TELL ME! What was this all FOR?!


PERSPECTIVE.
...On what?

...Hello?
AH!
CRACK
CRACK
CRACK
CRACK
CRACK
CRACK
CRAP...

TUP
Ah!
CRACK!

AAAAAAH!!
CRRRICK
CRACK
CRA
ZZZIP
That...
...that wasn't real.
huff huff
I didn't hurt anyone.
This is a memory.
Your memory.


And that was the Chimeric Plague.
Wasn't it?
That's what you did to all those children?
To me?
Can I even be angry at you?
It's not your fault that we're your prison.
You were blinded and fused into billions of amalgams by the monster you died to destroy.
And the parts of you that make us what we are...
...that guide how we grow and heal...
...are shaped so delicately that when you move on your own, you destroy them.
If you'd used me as a vessel when I asked-
would it have been another chimeric plague?

I've... wondered.
I... don't know if there's anything special about me that kept you from overwhelming me like the others, or if I'm just the lucky one you finally got right.
But whatever happened...
...since you broke through, I've been able to see you very clearly.
The patterns you take in healthy creatures, the growth and change their bodies can sustain and survive.
The ways we can help them without destroying what they are.
..."Perspective."
You didn't need a vessel, you needed a microscope.
I NEEDED EYES
THAT DID NOT HATE
WHAT I HAVE BECOME

Well, that's promising.
I think this part opens it.
Maybe it did four thousand years ago.
THOK
This way always works.
Good idea, but let's switch.
What? Why?
I don't think this access panel likes me.
Maybe you'll have better luck.
And this gives me a chance to see how my gear held up.
CHUNK!
It's been gathering dust in a prison lockup for nearly half a year now!

GRIIIIIIND
Nice work!
I didn't-
TWWIP!
AAAAAH!!
WHIZT
HEY!
DAINIX!

Oh, it's MUCH worse when I can actually see it!
Hang on!
FWIP
CLACK
THOK
Ah!
CRACK
CRUNCH
CRACK

SNAG!
Sure you don't want to turn into an indestructible fire-monster now?
Pretty sure!
Ask me again in five minutes, though!
Slow descent, then.
SNAP!
TWANG!
THWIP!
Whoa!
FALST!
Feel free to keep distracting me. It's only your life in my hands.
AH!
UP!

Gnn!
SNAP
Hold on!
I'll try and take out another eye!
Would you just-!
CRACK
AAH-!
Ah!
WHIP

FALST!
Fwoo
Fwoo
Na-no!
Rakhn-
I hit a gas pocket!
You have to move NOW!
CLACK

CRACK
KA-BOOM!
Whoa!
POP
POP
Come on-
SNAP
WHAM!
SKIDDDD

HUFF
HUFF
HUFF
Thanks for the save!
Did you have a grappling hook this WHOLE TIME?!
Oh - yeah. I had to try something, but it wouldn't have worked anyway.
It's designed to be used with the crossbow, but the bowstring-
TWANG
I'm getting REALLY sick of this place-
Hold on! Don't attack it!
I've got a theory.

SNAP
CLATTER
WHAT
Look!
SMASH
What just happened?
I was right!
It was reacting because it thought I was a threat!
But it can't be too smart if it didn't react to the rest of my tools.
It must be an older model than the ones back home.
So it didn't attack me because I wasn't armed?
Huh?
Oh, no, I don't think that was it.
I think it thought you were an Ancient.

...What?
I wasn't sure before, but this is the third bit of Ancient tech that's acted like you belong here.
The door opened for you, and the automatons keep trying to protect you.
You call what that thing outside did "protecting?"
It hit ME with a fireball. It just tried to grab you.
Pre-Emergence Ancient tech usually responds violently to humans and elves. You know - "cave folk."
It probably thought I was threatening you, like this one.
I think everything in this place that can still respond to commands will treat you like an Ancient.
Why?!
I have no idea. I was hoping you could tell me.
It could be an error, but it's odd they'd all malfunction in the exact same way.
Ferin didn't exist yet during the Ancient civilization, so maybe it doesn't know how to categorize you?
Or you could have more Ancient ancestry than average.
Do you know if one of your parents
NO.
No, I don't.
I barely remember them.
I'm sorry.
Don't.
People die. People leave. It doesn't mean anything.
If it thinks I'm Ancient, that makes leaving easier. We don't need to know why.
And if you make this weird, I'll let the next monster eat you.

Sounds fair. One condition, though.
What NOW?
First aid.
Sit down.
This is ridiculous. Do you even want to get out of here?
Yes! Yes, I want to get out of here!
And I don't want to end up dead because you're too proud to admit you might possibly need help!
I DON'T need help. I never have.
I'm only taking these hits because YOU'RE here!
...Which is what we're trying to solve.
THUD
You're not used to having allies, are you?
What do you mean?
I'm obviously VERY good at making friends.